



**SOUTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

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SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS RECOGNIZED FOR INNOVATION

One hundred fifty years ago, during his second inaugural address in 1865, President Abraham Lincoln articulated what would become the nation's obligation to Veterans: "to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan." Next week marks the 150th anniversary of that promise.

Today, there are more than 21 million Veterans – two-thirds of the 31 million total U.S. population in 1860. Caring for their particular needs, and their dependents' needs, requires more innovation and collaboration between federal and state governments than even a visionary like Lincoln could have foreseen.

On Feb. 24, VA Secretary Bob McDonald announced the recipients of the 2015 Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence Awards at the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) winter conference in Alexandria, Va.

The VA and NASDVA worked together to establish the Pillars of Excellence Awards to identify and formally recognize outstanding state programs that support or exemplify VA's strategic goals and priorities. Awards were presented for programs in three categories: Elimination of the Disability Claims Backlog, Improving Veteran Access to VA Benefits and Services, and Outstanding State Programs.

One of the four Outstanding State Programs award went to South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA) for Operation Reach All Veterans. SDDVA designated 2014 as the year to reach an estimated 75,000 veterans living in South Dakota. Operation RAV was conceived to identify and contact South Dakota's Veterans to make them aware of the benefits and services available to them.

The Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence Awards only showcase a small fraction of the innovations that states implement every day meet to Veterans' needs. VA will continue to work with states, tribes and territories to ensure Veterans receive the care and benefits they have earned, and live up to its mission – Lincoln's promise – to care for those "who shall have borne the battle" and for their families and survivors.

Other award recipients were:

Elimination of the Disability Claims Backlog - Ohio Department of Veterans Services

Improving Veterans Access to VA Benefits and Services - Alaska Division of Veterans Affairs

Improving Veterans Access to VA Benefits and Services - The Florida Department of Veterans Affairs

Outstanding State Programs - Idaho Division of Veterans Services

Outstanding State Programs - Texas Veterans Commission

Outstanding State Programs - Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs



Sec. Bob McDonald presented the Pillars of Excellence Awards to SDDVA Secretary Zimmerman and Deputy Secretary Pollard)



Sec. Bob McDonald presented the Pillars of Excellence Awards during this year's NASDVA Mid-Winter Conference. (REYNALDO LEAL/U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs)

